

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 10, 2004

The Honorable Colin L. Powell
Secretary
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Powell:

We are writing to express our concern over the serious problem of chemical spills in the St. Clair River. We request the State Department's assistance in addressing this situation.

The St. Clair River is one of the main connecting channels of the Great Lakes System. It flows southward about 40 miles connecting the southern tip of Lake Huron to Lake St. Clair. The river is part of the boundary between the United States and Canada.

Since last August, there have been two major chemical spills from the Canadian side of the St. Clair River. In August 2003, approximately 650 pounds of vinyl chloride monomer (VCM) were released over a three-day period into the St. Clair River from the Royal Polymer plant near Sarnia, Ontario. From there, the chemicals flowed down the St. Clair River to Lake St. Clair and the lower Great Lakes. VCM is a dangerous toxic chemical that has been linked to liver cancer. Compounding the health risk for communities downstream, there was a three-day delay before Royal Polymer reported the spill to the Canadian and U.S. authorities.

There was yet another serious chemical spill in the St. Clair River on February 1 of this year. Approximately 42,000 gallons of methyl ethyl ketone and methyl isobutyl ketone spilled into the river from the Imperial Oil Sarnia Refinery near Sarnia, Ontario. This spill forced 10 drinking water plants in Michigan to shut down.

These chemical spills are not isolated incidents. Chemical discharges in the St. Clair River are a chronic problem that negatively impact the environmental health of the St. Clair River and Lake St. Clair and pose serious health concerns to communities downstream. In addition to the major spills, we understand that smaller incidents occur on a regular basis, yet we do not even know how many of these incidents have happened or what their cumulative impact is on the quality of our water. EPA Administrator Leavitt has agreed to have his agency compile a complete listing of all chemical spills in the St. Clair River since the Joint Inland Pollution Contingency Plan went into effect in 1994.

Clearly there is an urgent need for greater preventive efforts on both sides of the border. In particular, it is important that the Canadian federal and provincial governments understand that these chemical spills simply must stop. We request that you raise this issue at the highest levels of the Canadian government and urge them to take concrete steps to prevent further chemical spills in the St. Clair River.

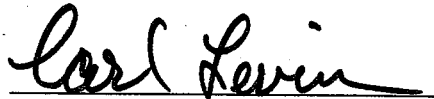
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We greatly appreciate your attention to this serious problem. We look forward to your response.

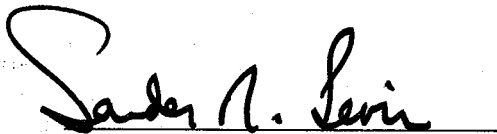
Sincerely,



Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator



Carl Levin
United States Senator



Sander Levin
Member of Congress

cc: Administrator Michael Leavitt, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Governor Jennifer Granholm, State of Michigan